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The Commission of Inquiry into Criminality, Political Interference, and Corruption in the Criminal Justice System (known as the Madlanga Commission) begins with testimony from KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) provincial police commissioner Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, whose allegations of widespread criminal infiltration of the justice system pre-empted the creation of the commission. The opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) political party announces that its Federal Council chairperson, Helen Zille, will be its mayoral candidate in Johannesburg in the 2026 local government elections. President Cyril Ramaphosa (2018-present) chastises African National Congress (ANC) municipal councillors over the party's poor local government record, highlighting Ramaphosa's concerns about the ANC's chances ahead of the municipal elections. An insolvency practitioner is murdered in a suspected hit, highlighting the rising threat of targeted killings in South Africa

Criminal justice corruption inquiry begins

The **Commission of Inquiry into Criminality, Political Interference, and Corruption in the Criminal Justice System** (known as the **Madlanga Commission**) [officially began](#) hearings on 17 September. President **Cyril Ramaphosa** (2018-present) ordered the formation of the commission on 13 July to investigate **KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)** provincial police commissioner **Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi's** allegations of criminal involvement in the justice system (*see ARC Briefing South Africa Jul 2025*).

Mkhwanazi's alleged on 6 July that a criminal syndicate involving police officers, prison staff, judges, and prosecutors has effectively captured **South Africa's** law enforcement and justice system. This syndicate is reportedly connected to a drug cartel centred in **Gauteng Province** that has ties to international drug organisations. Mkhwanazi alleged that the corrupt public servants and police officers involved in this syndicate are successfully stymying investigations and prosecutions of criminals in the country. Mkhwanazi further alleged that police minister **Senzo Mchunu** (now suspended) was actively protecting criminal interests and that this was the real motivation behind the minister's decision last year to disband the **South African Police Service (SAPS) KZN Political Killings Task Team (PKTT)**.

Unsurprisingly, Mkhwanazi was [the first witness](#) to testify before the commission. Among the key claims during his three days of testimony, Mkhwanazi reiterated his allegations and his belief that the PKTT was disbanded for political and criminal reasons. He supported his claim by providing an e-mail from KZN provincial director of public prosecutions **Elaine Zungu**, which expressed her confusion over the unit's disbandment. Mkhwanazi further detailed the alleged relationship between Mchunu, a South African businessman called **Vusi "Cat" Matlala**, and a politically connected individual called **Brown Mogotsi**. Both Matlala and Mogotsi are suspected of criminal activity. Mkhwanazi revealed that he had received veiled threats from Mogotsi, who appeared to have access to confidential information from **SAPS Crime Intelligence**, which led Mkhwanazi to believe that Mchunu was providing information to Mogotsi, who appeared to exert influence over the police minister.

The KZN provincial commissioner further detailed what he claimed was Mchunu's repeated inappropriate interference in police operations. However, Mkhwanazi also indicated that such political interference has long been a problem in South African policing. He alleged that in 2011, former police minister **Nathi Mthethwa** forced then Inspector-General of Intelligence, **Faith Radebe**, to withdraw the criminal case against former crime intelligence head **Richard Mdluli**, who was

accused of widespread criminal activity, including corruption and misappropriation. Mdluli was eventually convicted in 2019 of kidnapping and assault.

Already, it is evident that Mchunu's conduct will be a central focus of the Madlanga Commission. SAPS police commissioner **Fannie Masemola** was [the second witness](#) to appear before the commission, and much of his testimony also centred on Mchunu's alleged political interference. Specifically, Masemola claimed that he was concerned that Mchunu had overstepped the constitutional boundary between the police minister's duties and those of the SAPS commissioner. Notably, this concern was later reiterated by **Petronella van Rooyen**, the head of the SAPS legal division, who accused Mchunu of [usurping Masemola's powers](#) during her testimony on 25 September. This concern is connected to the decision to disband a police task force, which is the mandate of the police commissioner and not the minister. [Under South African law](#), the police minister oversees national policing policies, provides SAPS with political oversight, and sets policing priorities, while the SAPS commissioner has operational control.

However, South African police ministers have repeatedly overstepped their mandate. Mchunu's predecessor, **Bheki Cele**, was also accused of interfering in investigations and SAPS internal disciplinary matters.

The Madlanga Commission is expected to last at least six months, and the first two weeks of testimony indicate that the inquiry will hear testimony detailing widespread criminal and political interference in the justice system. The commission has the potential to be as politically damaging as the **State Capture Commission of Inquiry**.

Among the key takeaways from the first two weeks of testimony is that there are high levels of political interference in the country's justice system. This is clearly a source of tensions between police and political leaders. It also undermines the efficacy and function of SAPS. Mchunu's position is increasingly untenable, as even if the inquiry fails to reveal evidence of criminal activity by the minister, he has clearly repeatedly overstepped his mandate as police minister.

Mkhwanazi's testimony should concern the **African National Congress (ANC)**; he accused three current and former ANC police ministers of political interference to protect criminals or underperforming police commanders. Mogotsi, one of the alleged criminals who has influence over Mchunu, is believed to be an ANC member with close ties to senior ANC figures. The fact that the commission is centring on political interference in the police on behalf of criminal groups, it is inevitable that this will centre on current and former ANC figures, given that the party has been in power for over 30 years. This will further damage the ANC's standing ahead of the upcoming 2026 local government elections.

The commission has already had real-world impacts. Firstly, 121 investigations have been referred to the PKTT, which appears set to be reconstituted. In fact, it would be politically untenable for Masemola not to ensure that the unit is re-established and capitalised. More recently, **Ekurhuleni Metro Police Department (EMPD)** acting chief, **Julius Mkhwanazi** (no relation), has gone on special leave and is facing an investigation after Mkhwanazi accused him of illegally fitting Matlala's vehicles with EMPD blue blights.

However, the commission also faces serious challenges going forward. First and foremost, the commission has very broad and unwieldy terms of reference and a limited period in which to conduct its investigations. As such, it will need to prioritise which witnesses to call and what issues to address, which could open the inquiry to allegations of bias. Regardless, over the next six months, the commission will likely reveal numerous corruption and state capture allegations, which will fuel public anger over the state of South Africa's law enforcement and justice system.

Helen Zille to run for Johannesburg mayor

Public anger over the state of law enforcement will compound the widespread frustration about poor service delivery and numerous municipalities in the country. Opposition parties intend to leverage this anger to drive their upcoming local government election campaigns.

The most notable of these campaigns is the main opposition **Democratic Alliance's (DA)** bid to win control of **Johannesburg** (Gauteng) in the 2026 local government election. Indicative of the seriousness with which the DA views this election, the party [announced](#) on 20 September that the party's Federal Council chairperson, **Helen Zille**, will be its mayoral candidate in Johannesburg.

Zille is arguably the DA's best-known leader and its heaviest political hitter. She is a former DA federal leader (2007-2015) who has served as the mayor of **Cape Town** (2006-2009) and **Western Cape** provincial premier (2009-2019). It was arguably Zille's 2006 local government election victory in Cape Town which began the DA's emergence as a viable governing party. Zille is hoping to leverage her experience as mayor and premier to promote her mayoral bid in Johannesburg. Her performance as Cape Town mayor, in particular, has been widely praised, and she was [awarded the World Mayor Prize](#) in 2008.

However, Zille does face some serious electoral challenges in Johannesburg. Firstly, she is often a polarising political figure who can alienate voters with her abrasive political style, which can often be tone deaf on issues of class and race. Zille will also need to lean heavily on her Johannesburg roots to avoid being cast as an outsider condescendingly parachuted into the city. However, these personal disadvantages will also bring increased public attention to her campaign, which provides ample opportunity for the DA to push its campaign message.

Zille and the DA are betting that the deep-seated frustration over poor governance in Johannesburg will help convince voters to overcome their past aversion to voting for the DA. As such, Zille's campaign will focus on service delivery and infrastructure failures in Johannesburg. This is a calculated bid which could result in Zille leading a successful election campaign.

Yet, Zille's appointment as the DA's Johannesburg mayoral candidate revealed a serious weakness in the DA as a party, namely, the lack of well-known leaders within the DA. Zille is one of the very few DA politicians who have countrywide name recognition. Thus, it is unsurprising that the DA pushed her candidacy over a competent local leader, such as the DA's Johannesburg caucus leader **Belinda Kayser-Echeozonjoku**. If the DA is to actively grow its base, it needs more younger leaders to emerge and establish their own political brand recognition.

Ramaphosa expresses concern about the ANC's electoral chances

The DA's nascent local government election campaign has received an expected boost from Ramaphosa himself. In an address to a gathering of ANC municipal councillors on 15 September, Ramaphosa [acknowledged](#) that the DA controls many of the best-run municipalities in South Africa, causing a minor outcry within the ANC, with many accusing the party president of embarrassing the party and undermining its future election campaign.

However, Ramaphosa's address on 15 September laid clear the ANC leader's clear concern about the upcoming local government elections. The ANC had its worst ever electoral performance in the 2024 general election, which resulted in the party losing its national governing majority. Ramaphosa is also aware that the ANC tends to perform worse during municipal elections, where the party's poor local governance track record, voter apathy, and the ANC national leaders' lack of appeal weigh down on its national support. Although Ramaphosa's praise of the DA dominated the discourse following the gathering of councillors, the purpose of this assembly was to press on these councillors the urgency of the situation ahead of the election and the need to drastically improve local government service delivery over the next year.

Ramaphosa's concern is unlikely to translate into meaningful change at a local government level. To have a real impact, the ANC will need to reverse some of its dearest policies, such as cadre

deployment. Among the main causes of poor local governance (aside from corruption and mismanagement) has been the de-professionalisation of municipal services due to cadre deployment and the abuse of patronage systems. Ramaphosa tacitly admitted this during the **ANC National Executive Committee (NEC)** meeting on 13 September when he [noted](#) that “*many of the challenges [in municipalities] are often caused by poor or inadequately skilled personnel, who lack the required skills*”.

Insolvency lawyer killed in suspected hit

In a development highlighting the rising rate of assassinations and murders for hire in South Africa, unknown assailants [killed](#) a Johannesburg-based liquidation and insolvency attorney, **Bouwer van Niekerk**, in a suspected assassination on 5 September. Suspected hitmen shot and killed Van Niekerk at his offices in Johannesburg’s **Saxonwold** neighbourhood. The suspected hitmen had scheduled an appointment with the attorney.

Van Niekerk was believed to have been killed as a consequence of his work specialising in involuntary liquidations. He had received numerous death threats in the week preceding his murder, warning him to distance himself from one of his cases that centred on a suspected Ponzi scheme.

He is the latest insolvency practitioner to be killed in a suspected hit in recent years. The highest profile of these targeted killings was the murder of **Cloete** and **Thomas Murray** in 2023. These killings have raised concerns about the safety of practitioners in the field, especially those tasked with handling cases that involve suspected criminality. This threat poses a real risk to this profession that is essential to South Africa’s rule of law and business operating environment.

Murders for hire and targeted killings are on the increase in South Africa. These include both politically-affiliated killings, such as those investigated by the PKTT, as well as one’s targeting private sector operators such as van Niekerk. Such killings are a consequence of the rise of organised crime across South African society and economy, as well as the failure of law enforcement to adequately combat and contain such criminality.

Planner

22-23 Nov 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa) G20 Leaders’ Summit**

Nov 2026 (**South Africa**) Local government elections (expected)

Chronology

25 Sep 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa) News24**. The **Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (the Hawks)** raids Johannesburg’s **City Power** offices as part of a R500m (\$28.74m) corruption investigation;

25 Sep 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa) Bloomberg**. **Taiwan** suspends the chip export controls it imposes on South Africa on 23 September, providing relief for South Africa’s tech sector;

24 Sep 2025 **Cape Town (South Africa) Business Day**. **Patriotic Alliance (PA)** leader and sports minister, **Gayton McKenzie**, threatens to withdraw from both the **Government of National Unity (GNU)** coalition and the **Johannesburg (Gauteng Province)** municipal government;

23 Sep 2025 **New York (United States) Daily Maverick**. President **Cyril Ramaphosa** addresses the **United Nations (UN) General Assembly (UNGA)**, during which he takes a veiled swipe at the United States (US) when raising concerns about trade being used as a geopolitical weapon;

19 Sep 2025 **Washington, D.C. (United States)** *EWN*. Trade minister **Parks Tau** meets with **United States (US)** trade officials in an effort to reach a new trade agreement with the US, including tariff alleviation;

15 Sep 2025 **Modimolle (South Africa)** *EWN*. The trial of the three people accused of robbing President **Cyril Ramaphosa's** farm in **Limpopo Province** begins;

12 Sep 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **Thabo Mbeki Foundation** defends its decision to host members of the **Congolese** rebel group, **M23**, at its peace dialogue a week earlier;

12 Sep 2025 **Cape Town (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **National Assembly** passes the **Immigration Amendment Bill**, which aims to improve the treatment of people detained for immigration violations;

12 Sep 2025 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)** rejects the application by the **Islamic State of Africa** political organisation to register as a political party on the grounds that the organisation's principles are counter to the South African constitution;

12 Sep 2025 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *EWN*. Trade minister **Parks Tau** withdraws the gazetted draft amendments to the **National Credit Act of 2005** in response to public concerns over the impact on people with unpaid student debt;

10 Sep 2025 **Gqeberha (South Africa)** *Daily Maverick*. Opposition party, the **Patriotic Alliance**, wins the Ward 1 by-election in the **Kou-Kamma** local municipality, marking the party's ward victory in **Eastern Cape Province**, highlighting the PA's growth in that province;

5 Sep 2025 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *EWN*. The **South African National Defence Force (SANDF)** submits a request to the **Chinese** and **Russian** militaries to postpone planned naval exercises in November to avoid these exercises taking place at the same time as the **G20 Summit**;

29 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *News24*. The **South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)** announces that it will pursue hate speech sanctions against **Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)** leader **Julius Malema**;

29 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *News24*. The **National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA)** reveals that it made a miscalculation when calculating electricity tariffs, and as such, rates will actually need to increase by 8.8% in the 2026/27 and 2027/28 financial years instead of the respective 5.4% and 6.2% initially planned;

28 Aug 2025 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *EWN*. President **Cyril Ramaphosa** appoints **United States (US)** Nobel laureate **Joseph Stiglitz** as the head of an extraordinary committee of independent experts to deliver a report to the **G20** on global inequality;

28 Aug 2025 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *IEC*. The **Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC)** releases the first quarter 2025 political funding declarations report, revealing that the opposition **Democratic Alliance (DA)** declared over R32m (\$1.84m) in large donations during that quarter, compared with the **African National Congress' (ANC)** R7.7m (\$402,229)

27 Aug 2025 **Pretoria (South Africa)** *EWN*. Former **African National Congress (ANC)** spokesperson **Pule Mabe** applies to the magistrate's court to have his fraud and corruption charges withdrawn;

27 Aug 2025 **Johannesburg (South Africa)** *Daily Maverick*. The **National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)** reveals that it has a R10.6 billion (\$610m) budget shortfall this year.

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Getting in touch

Please contact us by email info@africariskconsulting.com

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